



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

MEXICAN MEN PLEAD GUILTY TO TRANSPORTING ILLEGAL ALIENS

An impounded van was illegally taken from a tow lot and used again for alien transport

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Two Mexican nationals pleaded guilty in federal court this morning to operating a business transporting illegal aliens within the United States, announced Todd P. Graves, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Missouri.

The same van used by these two men was later involved in a fatal accident near Columbia, Mo., in which five persons were killed. Both cases were investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Adrian Barraza-Gonzalez, 33, and Victor Alonso Medina-Perez, 27, both Mexican nationals, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Scott O. Wright this morning to charges contained in a July 20 federal indictment.

Barraza-Gonzalez and Alonso Medina-Perez each admitted that they were hired to drive illegal aliens across the United States.

In early May, Barraza-Gonzalez and Alonso Medina-Perez left Los Angeles with more than 15 illegal aliens in a van. On May 5, they drove the van into Fairfax County, Va., transporting three other illegal aliens. All of the van's occupants were arrested, Graves said, and the van was impounded. Some time after that, however, the van was taken from the tow lot in Virginia without the permission of the authorities and transported back to California.

In a separate case, Gelson Omar Mancilla-Santiago, 22, a citizen of Guatemala, admitted that he drove the same van from Los Angeles on June 17, and transported more than 17 illegal aliens. On June 19, the van was driven into Boone County, Mo., where it was involved in a single-vehicle rollover accident on Interstate 70 near Columbia, which resulted in the deaths of five passengers in the vehicle. Mancilla-Santiago pleaded guilty in a separate federal indictment to conspiring to operate a business to transport illegal aliens, and to illegally re-entering the United States after having been deported. Mancilla-Santiago admitted that he and another person drove the van, but Mancilla-Santiago claimed that he was not driving the van at the time of the accident.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Anthony P. Gonzalez is prosecuting these cases.

These cases were investigated by: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Fairfax County, Va., Police Department, the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the Columbia, Mo., Police Department and the Boone County, Mo., Sheriff's Department.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.